

Dependence

He had grown up in the trailer and he can vaguely remember when it had smelled like lilies, when there had been no rust beginning to eat away at the bottom and appearing in spots, like a teenager's acne ridden face, blurring where the horizontal blue stripe and white siding met. But now that he is older (and he is almost eight), it just smells like cigarettes and expired bologna and underneath all that is the smell of spoiled beer and a secret smell of vodka and whiskey. Mark Schaefer can even remember when there had been a hanging lily in the living room, shaded by white blinds from the cruel desert sun, except now only the clay pot remains on the side table by the tattered blue-and-red plaid couch. An ashtray is precariously balanced on the cheap white plastic table too, overflowing with the stubs and half smoked remains of Camels.

He picks them up and puts his lips to the end of one, spitting it back out quickly as a stale taste starts to creep in. Mark stares down at the cigarettes and then pulls the plastic bag towards himself again, his slender fingers grabbing the glass ashtray and spilling some of the stubs as he empties them into the bag. He sets the ashtray back and then gets on his knees, picking the cigarette butts out of the thin carpet. It is a beige that is as dull as the sand outside, with black circles and ovals from when his dad will pass out on the floor with a lit cigarette in his tar-stained fingertips and in the other will be some beer or maybe a liquor bottle, both vices clutched tightly in his hands.

Mark takes the half-smoked ones (and there are some, even if there's not a lot) and puts them in a neat pile on the sofa. Once he's got all the cigarettes cleared, he takes a few from the pile and takes them to his bedroom, putting them on his bookshelf behind his stack of Henry Huggins books. They join a larger pile, bringing his total up to somewhere around 25. He wonders when his dad will wake up because he's hungry and they've been out of cereal for ages and he's not allowed to mess with the stove or microwave.

His bedroom door is to the right of the TV and he peeks his head out, but he only sees the rays of the sun as it sneaks in through the slats of the blinds, dust somehow rising and falling, as if it's locked in bright puzzles of light. He slides out of the bedroom, closing the door with a click behind himself, and picks up his plastic bag, continuing his cleaning as

he throws cans of Natural Light and Coors and Coors Light and Budweiser. When he's finally done with that, he drags the bag across the living room to the front door, which is parallel to the kitchen counter where they eat breakfast. Their plates from supper the night before are still there, the only leftovers of the spaghetti is Ragu meat sauce crusted on the blue ceramic.

His fingers clumsily tie the top of the bag, only giving a loose knot before he decides to give up and leave the bag by the front door. Climbing onto his dad's recliner, unworried about falling back because it's been broken for ages, he widens the opening between two slats on the blinds and squints out to see what the thermometer says even though it's only nine in the morning. The cracked Coca-Cola thermometer says "83 F" and Mark stares, wondering how hot it's going to get that day. His dad only runs the air conditioner if it gets above 95. He slides down the back of the recliner, bouncing slightly as he hits the seat, and takes the plates to set them in the sink with the other dishes. He leaves those for his dad, though.

His dad doesn't get up until just after ten and by then Mark has turned on the TV, watching some mindless Saturday morning cartoon full of explosions and fighting and friendship (in that order). The static causes the occasional splotch of gray and white spots, the picture rolling slightly before righting itself. Mark is wondering if all parents are like the ones on TV and he doesn't think so, although he's not entirely sure.

He hears his dad's door creak open and the doorknob jangles because it's so loose, so Mark scrambles off the sofa, his back sore from sitting too long in the depression in the middle. He stands with his feet splayed and his dad is standing with his eyes still partially swollen from sleep, his shaggy gray and black hair partially obscuring his face. He yawns and Mark sees his chest expand, making him look down at his dad's pot-belly hanging over his black boxer-briefs. He has a hand on the kitchen counter, looking from the poorly tied plastic bag by the front door, filled with the remnants of the poker night with his friends the night before, to his son, who is standing with a hand on the arm of the couch. Mark sees a brief look of frustration cross his face and he doesn't know why and he is too young to know that it's the sight of him, tall for his age so that it looks like someone just stretched skin over his skeleton so that his ribs show and his stomach is slightly concave, his knees and elbows knobby no matter how he holds himself. His long black hair is lank and has a slightly resinous look to it, curling behind his ears. The only thing he is wearing is black athletic shorts.

"What's the time?" his dad asks, sitting on the bar stool by the kitchen counter. He yawns again.

“It was ten,” Mark says. His dad stretches and Mark sees the grimace cross his face as his joints pop. He gets his pack of cigarettes from the other end of the counter and fishes one out, lighting it in two quick motions with a match and taking a deep drag.

“Alright. You hungry?”

Mark nods, unsure of whether or not this will be a good day. His dad exhales, making a few smoke circles. He inhales again.

“We don’t have cereal. We’ve got eggs and some bread and butter. What about scrambled eggs?”

Mark nods again, unsure whether or not he should believe that this will be a good day, but he loves scrambled eggs. They’ve always been his favorite and no one makes them like his dad.

“Quit with that. I know you can talk.”

“Yeah.”

“When was the last time you took a damn bath?”

Mark thinks for a moment. “Thursday. Wednesday, maybe.”

“We’re gonna go into town later. Take a shower while I cook.”

“OK.”

His dad exhales again. Inhales. Holds it in. He makes more smoke rings. He inhales and lets the smoke exhale from his nose as he looks over at the plastic bag and then over the semi-clean living room. Mark wants to sit, but he clutches the arm of the couch and stays standing.

Then he balances the cigarette on his lip and his eyes settle on Mark, green eyes meeting the same brilliant shade of green.

“You do that?” he asks, jerking his head to the side towards the bag.

Mark nods, afraid to speak.

His dad looks at him for a long moment, not letting him look away, and he snuffs the cigarette on the kitchen countertop, throwing the half-smoked thing somewhere behind him. He hitches his boxer-briefs up as he goes into his bedroom to get showered and dressed.

And not long after, maybe fifteen minutes, his dad comes out wearing his faded blue jeans with a white shirt tucked in, the rectangular box of the cigarette visible in one of his rolled up shirt sleeves. His hair is brushed back. Mark watches him as he heads over to the fridge and digs around. His dad doesn’t seem to notice as he reaches for his cigarettes, quickly pulling one out and sticking it in his mouth, where it hangs on his lower lip.

His left hand slides into his pants pocket, clutching around something in there. His right hand is still fishing in the fridge. His left hand comes out with his silver lighter and he flips back the lid, quickly lighting his cigarette. He begins to smoke it frantically, drawing the smoke into his lungs one second and exhaling it only a few seconds later. Mark feels an

inexplicable urge to look away, but he doesn't. He does not seem to notice how his hands clutch the front of his legs, so tightly that his knuckles are white.

His dad shuts the fridge and looks around at the clean living room. "Were there any cans you didn't throw away?"

"I don't think," Mark says, not understanding why he has to fight the urge to turn away so strongly. "I tried to clean up good."

Mark looks straight at his dad, hoping that will stop him from turning because he thinks turning is the worst thing he could do and he has never wanted to *not* see his dad. He loves his dad and he knows that for sure, as sure as he knows anything anyway. He does not turn, but his dad looks away, scanning the living room. He sighs and seems to accept something, lighting another cigarette already.

"Get your shower," he says finally. "There's a good boy, Markie."

Mark does get his shower and wears his favorite khaki shorts with a red tank top, showing off his tan until it ends just at the top of his shoulders to show pallid skin. He scrambles onto the barstool as his dad finishes up cooking, digging into the eggs as soon as they're set down in front of him. He piles them onto one of the buttered triangles of toast, his fingers pushing them back into place as he takes a bite.

"How's school?" his dad asks, eating his own triangle of toast in two quick bites.

Mark shrugs, then corrects himself. "It's OK."

"We didn't get to talk much this week."

"You were workin'. It's OK."

"What're they teaching you?"

"Multiplication," Mark says, shoving the rest of his toast in his mouth. "I like it."

Out of the corner of his eye he sees his dad's smile and he grins too until he realizes his mouth is still full of toast and eggs.

"Math was always one of my favorites. Math and science together are even better."

"You mean like... um... like chemistry, right?"

"Chemistry is the best, but physics wasn't too bad. Not much of that in medical school though."

He didn't like to talk about before when Mark was born and Mark wonders if he can get him to talk, but as soon as he opens his mouth to ask something, anything, his dad has turned his back to finish off the coffee and begins doing the dishes.

"I'm gonna go outside," Mark says, "OK?"

His dad grunts something and Mark scrambles to the couch, sticking an arm underneath to find his boots. He loves his boots and they're almost just like his dad's, except smaller. Tan work boots with sturdy laces and steel-toes, rubber treads, metal eyes, and a soft

leather band around the top to stop them from irritating where they end just at the tops of his ankles.

He pulls them on and yells that he's going out. Pausing at the front door, he waits to hear if his dad will yell for him to get back inside, but there is nothing except the sound of the water in the sink running and the faint gurgle of the hot water heater from the laundry room. Mark steps onto the top step of the metal stairs and nervously looks down between the slats, his eyes scanning the bright and dark stripes of sand as the dry heat of the desert rolls over him, starting with the sun that burns his eyes. He squints and double-checks under the stairs before he steps down them. At the bottom, he pauses and listens again, but he hears nothing, not even the distant roar of a car speeding down the state route they live on. Not that many people come out this way, eleven miles north of their town. It's rare that anyone even goes to their town anyway.

His shovel and other tools are across the desert sand yard, by the loosely hung up barbed wire between each wooden post. The trailer is on a rectangular acre of land that his dad had bought before Mark was born, before something bad had happened that made him resign from his teaching position somewhere and he had meant to build himself a real house with a foundation and all instead of the trailer. Mark only knew that much from eavesdropping when his dad's best friend Goose would come over and they would stay up all night, talking about when they were in college. He wondered if the dirty feeling that came from his knowledge was from eavesdropping or something else about it, or maybe both.

Mark walks over to his tools and kneels down, pulling his sunglasses from his pocket and shoving them on while he counts the tools to make sure they are all there. His shovel, his pick, the homemade sifter, the hand shovel-- he settles down on his knees and takes a quick peek into his hole. It's only a foot deep and a foot across, the pile of dirt and sand he's sifted through in a neat pile off to the side, and he sees nothing in the hole.

He starts digging methodically, piling the dirt on the sifter as he takes it from the earth, and when he gets a respectable pile, he lifts up the sifter with the handles from an old pot and gently shakes it. The rocks he gets are nothing special, only a small black one and a few larger gray ones. He repeats it over and over as his hole gets bigger and he wonders if this spot is really any good after all. He'd found a sharp piece of shale that he had whetted on the asphalt highway until it was an arrow, unsure of why he'd done it in the first place and he still wasn't sure a week later, even though he'd placed it on the bookshelf with his other rocks.

Deciding to abandon this spot within another foot (it was now a little over two feet across and a foot and a half deep), he is ruminating over a strange red rock when his ears first pick up on it, but he is wondering about the red rock, rubbing it on his arm. Nothing comes off and he had been sure it wasn't sandstone anyway, but maybe-- and then he hears

it again, stronger now. He feels his heart stop and he holds his breath reflexively, as though that would be a diversion to the rattling noise he hears behind himself. His dad had always said it never sounded much like a rattle to him, more like the rustling corn from way back when he lived in Iowa, when the corn would be scorched from bad summers or when some stalks just died and the wind--

Mark holds the hand shovel in his left hand, but he knows better than to move, than to irritate it except that he's always been terrified of rattlesnakes, even when the old Indians in town would collect them and then charge the tourists money to watch them pretend to perform ancient, patently fake Indian "magic" and they called Mark their favorite little white boy and he knew they would never let the snakes hurt him or strike, but he had seen a boy get bitten one summer a few years back--

And Wesley's never been the same and Mark is suddenly screaming, knowing that the snake is going to be aggravated--

He hears the door to the trailer fly open just five seconds later and his dad swears before he says loudly and firmly, "Markie, don't move and for the love of God, stop screaming!"

He stops screaming, used to obeying his father on command and clamps his mouth shut, biting his lips so hard that he thinks that he'll draw blood. The rattling noise intensifies and he stares down into his hole, wondering dully if it's the last thing he'll see before he is the special at the rattlesnake café and then he has to bite his lips harder to stop from giggling.

And suddenly, there is a loud awful crack that happens just before the rattling fades off. Mark stays frozen until he feels his dad's hands, one on his shoulder and the other grabbing his upper arm to pull him up. He finally takes a breath and then he is glad his dad has a tight hold of him as dizziness almost makes him topple over. Everything around him seems brighter and sharper after he exhales his gulp of air. Even the dull beige of the sand and the scuffed sides of the trailer.

His dad brushes the dirt off of his clothes while he stands there, taking deep breaths and looking up at the brilliant blue sky. It stretches on for miles and miles and he is sure he can imagine it beyond the horizon.

"You're OK, Markie," his dad says, briefly squeezing his shoulder. "Anyway, we better get to town soon. I told Goose I'd be by around 11:30."

"OK," Mark says, taking off his sunglasses and blinking hard as the sun shines into his eyes. He turns around and looks down at the remains of the snake. It had been a big one. Five feet long, except Mark can't tell how big its head had been. All that he sees is a puddle of blood gathered in the indent where his father had jumped on it and the blood is seeping out, staining the sand bright red.

“Dad,” he starts to say.

“Sometimes you’ve just got to do it, Markie,” his dad says, even though Mark wasn’t sure what he’d even meant to ask or say. “Now come on.”

His dad strides away with his head held up and one hand in his pocket while the other holds his car keys to the white Toyota Camry in the dirt driveway. Mark begins to follow him until he sees the blood on his dad’s work boots, sand clinging to it and clumping together, and it is spattered up the back of his jeans to just under his knees. Mark stares until his dad gets to the car and yells at him to follow, but the entire ride to town he looks at his dad’s jeans and the bloody boots.

The only time Mark can really remember that his dad has a grown-up name is when they go to town (about once a week or every couple weeks) or when he delves deep into his early memories, so early that they have a dreamy quality to them with the edges of the memories blurry like an old movie from the 1940s. When he makes his climb down into his early memories, he closes his eyes and hears his mother’s voice clearly, saying sharply, “Jack!” and then he always remembers “You promised me better” and Mark can’t remember more than that, not knowing what she means.

The only other thing he remembers about her is when she had screamed, “Jack! I can’t do it anymore. You promised-” and then she had said no more, she had looked at where Mark had been playing quietly in a corner by his bedroom door and she had opened her mouth, like she wanted to say more, but she never did (and maybe she had, but he couldn’t remember) before she stepped out of the door, closing it quietly behind her and that’s what Mark hates most about the memory, how quietly she closed the door when she left.

His dad had been silent the rest of the evening and the rest of the week. They had been cuddled together on the couch watching Tom and Jerry when his dad got a phone call. Mark does not remember what his dad said or much of what he did, but he had taken the lily from where it hung from the ceiling and he’d put it on the side table, where it stayed and managed to survive for a few weeks until it died, shriveled up and brown. His dad had tossed the dead flowers and dirt outside and set the pot back on the table.

Mark remembers what he’d been playing with the day his mother left. He’d been playing with his Matchbox cars and Legos. His favorite car had been a dark blue Datsun Z. But no matter how hard he tries, he closes his eyes tightly and can never remember what she’d looked like or what her name had been.

As soon as they get to Goose’s trailer on the outskirts of town, his dad washes his boots off with the hose that Goose uses to water his plants. Somehow he manages to grow

all kinds of potted flowers in the desert and he sets them out in the mornings and evenings for sun, but he always drives home on his lunch break to bring them inside during the hottest part of the day. Mark leans over and smells a blue flower while his dad washes off his boots and he touches the green leaves gently, thinking that there's nothing like that in the desert. Cactuses are sharp and rough and spiny and brush hurts when he falls down.

"Glad your skinny white ass is finally here," Goose says, sticking his head out of the door. He is a bronze man with long black hair that he pulls into a ponytail. His nose is beaklike and everything on him is long, especially his neck. He is not wearing a shirt today and Mark can see his tattoos, bright shades of red, yellow, green, purple, blue, orange that make up a flower collage which stretches from where the neckline of his t-shirts are until his knees and elbows.

"Well at least I know I'm white," his dad says, "you can't figure out if you're red or brown or all of 'em."

"I'm Greek today," Goose says. "I want some olives and a gyro."

"Please, if you were Greek you wouldn't be a *failed* philosophy major."

Goose grins. "There's a logical fallacy--"

"Ah, shut the fuck up. Did you get any of that?"

"Don't doubt me, gringo. I've had it. You're the one who hardly ever comes to town."

The door opens further and his dad goes up the metal stairs, entering and Mark follows, sighing in relief as the air conditioning washes over him.

"Go see what's on cable," Goose says to him. "Your dad and I got to talk about something."

"Alright," Mark says agreeably. "Do you got any--"

"Course. They're in the freezer. I just got 'em yesterday."

Mark watches them go into Goose's bedroom and goes to the freezer, which he rifles around to find the box of popsicles. All the grape are gone already, but they always are unless Goose had just got them. He takes one that he thinks is orange and is not disappointed by the bright orange that greets him when he rips open the wrapper.

He and his dad only get what the antennae gives them, so he puts Goose's TV on Nickelodeon, watching a few episodes of some dumb show about a kid with some kind of godparents. When he starts getting twitchy and looks around at the family photos Goose has up, his dad comes out with Goose right behind him. The smoke that faintly trails out makes him think of cigarettes, but the smell isn't and Mark wonders what it is.

They go over to the sink and get glasses of water from the tap, sucking them down and then setting them on the counter. Goose and his dad stand at the counter for awhile, staring down at it while the cartoon plays in the background.

"I gotta get going," his dad finally says after studying his hands. "I told some people I'd be around today-"

"You can't keep givin' 'em medical advice," Goose says slowly. "You-"

"I know what I gotta do or don't do."

"Maybe so."

Mark looks between them and wonders if he could get away with another popsicle, thinking that he probably could. Goose pulls something out of his pocket and hands it to his dad, who stuffs it in his pocket. The only thing Mark sees is a brief flash of green.

He does manage to get another popsicle from Goose, who briefly hugs him before he leaves, and as they walk to the car, Goose comes out to bring his plants in for the hot part of the day. Mark stands and watches him pick up his hose to water them first. Just like with everything else so far since the rattlesnake, the flowers are sharper than they've ever been. Even the jagged edges of the leaves are crisp and clear. The collage on Goose's body is life-like and as he moves, the flowers and leaves move too, as though they're real and the wind is blowing.

"What's that?" Mark asks suddenly, pointing to a flower he's never seen before.

"That's a fleur-de-lis, or what they based 'em on anyway," Goose says. Mark keeps his mouth closed, not wanting to admit he doesn't know what Goose is talking about.

"Fleur-de-lis are what used to be on heraldry shields for the royalty of France," his dad says, leaning against the car. His lips are tightly pursed together, his arms are across his chest, and Mark doesn't know why he won't listen when his dad looks like that, except he has to know what the flower is.

"But what-" Mark starts to say.

"They're just lilies," Goose says, putting his sprayer on a gentle setting. "Those are Easter lilies."

There is a pause and Mark looks between his father and honorary uncle. Goose looks at Mark for a moment and Mark is sure he wants to say something, except when he looks to his dad, he looks like the time Mark got caught skipping school after jumping the fence at recess and wandering around town with Eddie. When Mark sees them lock eyes, his dad shakes his head just so and he bets he wasn't supposed to see it. He knows it was for Goose because now Goose is frowning a little bit, one hand shoved into his jeans pocket and wipes his mouth with the hand holding the hose.

"You better get going, Jack," Goose says.

"Yeah," his dad says, putting a hand on the car door handle. "They're expecting me at the clinic."

Goose frowns and shrugs, starting to water his plants. "I'll see you around."

His dad opens the car door and gets in. Mark doesn't follow right away, his eyes still on the lilies as Goose waters them.

"Mark, get in," his dad says sharply. "I haven't got time for you to-"

"I'm comin'," Mark says. He pulls on the car door handle and gets in, pressing his nose to the window after buckling the seatbelt. Goose turns around and winks at him, but he's still frowning as he turns back to his flowers.

They're silent on the short drive through town and Mark watches the buildings on Main Street flash by. Most of them are old and broken-down, with crumbling brick fronts and rotted wooden window frames that don't hold nails well, making the plywood covers crooked or falling off except for a few brave nails left. The tallest building in town is the factory that looms off on the opposite side of where their trailer is on the state route. Most of the houses Mark sees are simple one story bungalows with faded or chipped paint jobs of white. The best neighborhood in town (not that *that* is much of an honor, Mark hears his dad say) is where his best friend Eddie lives and his dad drives one more block, pulling into the gravel parking lot in front of the only medical facility in town, operated by a doctor fresh out of residency named Rena Kadlubowski. It is a six room clinic with a waiting room, a file storage room where the receptionist sits, a medical storage room, and three exam rooms, one of which is used for more storage. Mark likes the storage rooms because they have the best places to play hide and seek.

His dad takes a deep breath and shuts off the car after parking. He pulls his pack of cigarettes out of his sleeve and lights one, sighing as he takes a deep drag and then begins to cough. The ashes are knocked into the ashtray. Mark wants to get out, but he is not sure whether or not he should.

"I'll be here til 3:30," his dad says, as though he hears Mark's thoughts. "I'll be by Eddie's to get you around then. Nowhere else, understand?"

Mark starts to nod, but stops himself to say, "Yes. Can-"

"Just go," his dad says.

Not needing to be told twice, Mark scrambles out of his seatbelt and seat, setting off for Eddie's at a near run. He looks both ways to cross the street and turns for a moment to see his dad smoking on the wheelchair ramp of the clinic. He goes into the clinic door and Mark edges between an abandoned building and a rusty chain link fence until the building ends and he escapes into an old loading area. He squeezes himself between the chain link fence and the gate, which is still padlocked to the fence but hangs on by one hinge. Avoiding the five foot cactus right in front of him, he finds himself in the Suarez's backyard. Granny Suarez is sipping a can of Coke and grins toothlessly at him from her perch in a lawn chair on the small back deck.

"Fine day, Mark," she says, "your dad over to the clinic?"

“Yeah,” Mark says. “Is Eddie home?”

“He went with his mother to the grocery store,” Granny says, “but they’ll be back soon enough. Come have this Coke with me.”

Mark goes to her and settles on the deck by her chair, taking the Coke when she offers it. The carbonation burns his mouth and throat cheerily and he sets the can down, relishing the syrupy taste. His dad doesn’t buy soda much, except Dr. Pepper because that works best with whiskey. Granny takes a look at him and pulls out a homemade cigarette, puffing away as soon as she lights it.

“Ain’t seen a rattler around here in awhile,” she says. “So no need to worry.”

“I wasn’t,” Mark says, but his taut posture relaxes noticeably. He lets his feet dangle over the edge of the porch. Granny pats his shoulder and he winces a little, looking to see his sunburn flaring up. She makes a ‘tsking’ noise and pulls his tank top up to inspect the redness.

“Don’t you remember to get aloe or put on sunscreen?” she asks. “You’re an awful pale gringo-” but as she looks at him, he gets a funny feeling that she’s kidding about the white boy part. He isn’t sure he’s entirely a white boy because he will burn once or twice a year and then turn dark brown the rest of the time. His dad will just burn and peel over and over, getting a very light tan if he is lucky, and he cracks jokes about being a Kraut.

“No,” he says honestly. “I don’t ‘member much. Dad says to sometimes, when he ain’t-- sometimes he says to.”

He sees Granny pause and makes an odd sound with her mouth, something like a cat and like she’s trying to control it. Mark feels himself flushing.

“I mean, he says to. He tells me to. But I don’t-”

“Your dad drink a lot?” she asks casually. Mark wants to say ‘no’ immediately, but he pauses.

“No,” he says after a moment.

But the image of his dad comes to him and he sees him with a beer bottle in his hand or a whiskey or vodka bottle and then he feels a curious relief as he sees his dad with a bottle of Dr. Pepper, except the image plays out like a movie and his dad takes a swig from another bottle before he drinks the Dr. Pepper.

“He doesn’t drink a lot,” Mark says in response to nothing. Granny only nods a little and reaches for him.

It’s strange how her hand is cool on his burned shoulder. She gets up and tells him to sit there a moment and she comes back just as he hears a car pulling into the driveway. He knows it’s Eddie and his mother and siblings and as he gets up to run and greet them, Granny pulls his shirt off. He holds still for a moment when she begins to slather his shoulders and neck with aloe.

“Now go inside for a few hours and let that soak in,” Granny says, smoking her cigarette down to a stub. “And don’t let Eddie convince you to wrestle or none of that!”

Mark grins at her and runs into the house, ending up in the kitchen where he is immediately put to work unloading groceries alongside Eddie’s brother. Knowing that Eddie’s mother is watching them, Mark is careful about putting things away and drags the plastic bag across the floor to put away ravioli. He’s sure he feels her watching him, like he could say exactly where he feels her eyes are burning into his back.

He puts a can of spaghetti in the pantry and another ravioli in front of it. Slowly he reaches down and pulls another can out (Campbell’s Chicken Noodle) and holds it in one hand, absently listening to Alfie’s voice. In the reflection of the stainless steel fridge, he sees her in the doorway. It’s not until he looks at his hands that he notices a slight tremble in his fingers. As he stands there he hopes that she will give him a hug, even if he’s got a bad sunburn. She has the best hugs, even if he doesn’t want her to know that or anyone to know, especially not Eddie or his dad.

Someone puts a gentle hand on his shoulder, so gentle that he knows it’s there but his sunburn doesn’t hurt at all and then there is a hand on each shoulder and a familiar smell of something sweet, like Goose’s flowers--

“Mark, you didn’t even say hello,” she says softly. He tries to stop the smile that appears out of nowhere, but it’s no good to even pretend it doesn’t happen. He turns around and she leans down to wrap her arms around him. He can smell perfume faintly, can feel her soft cotton shirt against his sunburn and aloe and it doesn’t hurt at all and her cheek is pressed to the top of his head, and he isn’t sure but he thinks that he might even feel--

Eddie comes barreling into the kitchen, shouting that he couldn’t find the milk and stupid Alfie must’ve left it at the store--

Mark drops the can of soup in surprise and it falls on the floor.

And Alfie says that milk wasn’t his job this week, so there and anyway--

“Stop it,” she says sharply, pulling away. Mark’s smile disappears and he bites his lower lip to stop himself from frowning because he thinks that frowning is a step away from crying like a little kid.

“Be careful with the Campbell’s, Mark,” she says in a scolding tone, but she’s still smiling. She leans down to get it. “It’s all Emilio will eat sometimes.”

Mark looks down to the floor, at his feet, and bites his lip harder. He tries to think of who Emilio is and it takes him a moment to realize that it’s Eddie’s father and her husband and the other son, the oldest one, so it doesn’t matter anymore. He’s not really in their family, it’s just his dad and him, even though he sometimes wonders about his mother.

“Come on,” Eddie says, grabbing his arm suddenly, “I got a new skateboard--”

Mark cringes and Granny Suarez smacks Eddie in the back of the head. "Watch yourself. He's got a sunburn."

Eddie lets go. "Sorry."

Granny and his mom look at him and he grins weakly, shrugging like it didn't matter and wondering what he was shrugging and grinning about when it all mattered. Eddie flies down the hall and Mark feels someone's hand on his shoulder.

"You ain't going outside with that burn," Granny says. "Come sit in the air with me for awhile. *Cops* will be on."

Mark sits uncertainly beside Granny on the sofa. She flops down and starts sipping at a fresh Coke, offering some to Mark as the *Cops* theme song begins to play. Mark watches the first episode, nodding along to Granny's commentary ("Look at that bitch move, Mark! If she ain't snorting coke then I don't know what she's doin'") and he starts to nod off as the second episode begins. His head drops against Granny's arm, but instead of pushing him off she shifts a little and he tries to fight his sleep, but he figures it's no use. He's been up since eight and he thinks he'll just have a short nap as he lets himself fall down into sleep.

Waking up takes him a few moments. Mark stretches, feels his shoulders pop, and rubs his eyes, looking around the living room blurrily. Everything comes into focus suddenly and he pulls a blanket off his shoulders as he swings his legs over the couch and to the floor. He sees his shoes on the floor by his feet as he walks towards the kitchen. He stops just outside the kitchen door as he hears his name and then someone says, "Jack isn't a bad guy--"

"He's a drunk, isn't he?" Eddie's mother says. Mark imagines her with a wrinkled nose, like she did whenever he and Eddie got so dirty she sprayed them on the back deck before letting them inside.

"Mark says he doesn't drink much," Alfie says. He is thirteen, which is old enough for most adult conversations and Mark thinks that this is one so he hangs back, wondering what they will say.

"Sweetie," Granny says, "Mark will tell you his dad is the best one on Earth. That sunburn is almost sun *poisoning* and you would think that *Doctor* Jack Schaefer could see that. But Mark ain't a whiskey bottle, that's all."

It is very odd to hear them discussing his dad and he like that. He stands as still as he can, focusing his eyes on the white wall near him. Just out of the corner of his eye he sees part of a picture of Eddie and his brothers.

"Of course he'll say that," Eddie's mother says. "Most boys say that about their fathers when they're seven."

"Oh, Yvonne, that poor chico," Granny says, "I s'pose Jack ain't all bad, but that poor chico. He's going to have a terrible time some day when he realizes--"

“He’s a good boy,” Eddie’s mother says. “He’s smart. I hope he stays friends with Eddie. Eddie is going to need someone who has some sense--”

And then the conversation became about Eddie and his BMX bike. Mark stood outside of the kitchen for a few minutes, a few very long minutes, as he stared at the white wall with Granny and Yvonne’s words bouncing around in his brain. They bounced around and then they settled somewhere and he was sure he could feel the words blister where they fell, or maybe they burrowed in like a poison and they would stay there until they were ready to come finish their job.

Mark thinks about his dad’s drinking and thinks about how much he does. He buys maybe a twelve pack every few days. That’s not so bad, Mark figures. His dad works hard and works an awful lot and he deserves something, doesn’t he? Mark is allowed to collect his rocks and all, even though there’s rattlers and scorpions all around.

He barely realizes his bottom lip is sticking out as he starts pouting. Like Granny and Yvonne knew anything anyway. They just sat around the house all day while Emilio worked as the head foreman--

And suddenly an image from earlier returns to him. He sees his dad take a swig from a vodka bottle, chase it with beer, and then finish that off with Dr. Pepper. It is a beautiful summer’s day and they are at the desolate playground on the outskirts of town, Mark playing with Eddie while Yvonne and Granny sit with his dad and they talk to him, but they sit away from him. Mark had slipped in between Yvonne and his dad, thinking the spot was perfect for him, but it had only been there because she hadn’t wanted to sit next to his dad, a drunk.

No no no no don’t even start thinking Markie don’t even believe don’t even--

He whispers to himself, “they don’t know what they’re talkin’ about.”

He repeats it. Again. Again. After a few more times, he goes into the kitchen to ask for a snack, the mantra playing itself in his head for a long time, until three-thirty when he starts looking out of the windows for his dad. Eddie is too busy with his new skateboard and Mark sits in the front room with Yvonne while Granny naps. At a little before four, Mark hops up for the seventh time and looks through the slats of the blinds.

“Are you waiting for someone?” Yvonne asks. Mark goes back to the couch and sits beside her.

“My dad said... well, he said he’d be done around three-thirty.”

“I’m sure he’s just running late. He’s busy. Rena is sweet, but she doesn’t know as much as he does.”

Mark likes to hear the compliment because it eases the poison in his mind. The word ‘drunk’ doesn’t seem as mean. He smiles shyly at her and she smiles back.

But by five-thirty, her smile is gone and so is his.

“He said he’d be here by now,” Mark says. He jumps up yet again, paces briefly, looks out of the window, and goes back to the sofa. He is biting his lower lip, gnawing on it, and then he will jump up again.

“I’m sure he did,” she says wearily.

“He said-”

“I *know*, Mark.”

Mark stops and looks at her. He does not know that she can see the watery shine in his eyes, although he does feel his eyes itching and burning as he rubs them again. He lets out a shaky breath.

“Are you sure you didn’t mishear him, Markie?” she asks. He shakes his head and stops himself from telling her not to call him that.

“When is Mr. Suarez home?”

She looks at the clock above the TV. “He’ll be home any minute now.”

“I need-”

“He likes you. I know you don’t think so, but he does.”

Mark shrugs and stares at the clock as the second hand clicks steadily over the face.

“If he’s not here when Emilio gets home, he can walk you down. I’m sure he’s just running late at the clinic.”

Mark does not believe her. It is the first time he has never believed her. She has never lied to him, but he remembers her calling his dad a ‘drunk’ and he doesn’t believe her. She does not believe his dad is at the clinic anymore than she believes he isn’t a drunk. He looks at her, beautiful Yvonne and her naturally blonde hair and light natural tan, and he is sad to think that he will start not believing her more often, even though he can’t say why, even though she has never lied to him before.

The kitchen door opens and Mark hears Eddie yelling for his father.

“I can walk on my own,” he says. “It ain’t too late. I’ll just go by the street so if he comes by-”

The look she gives him makes him stop talking. He blushes and sits on the edge of the couch to pull on his shoes, clumsily tying them as Emilio walks in. He walks away to leave through the front door.

“Mark!” he hears her say. “Markie, stay-”

“What’s he still doing here past three-thirty?” he hears Emilio ask, but he hears no answer as he slips through the door and closes it. He ignores Eddie and Alfie calling to him, hurrying down the street even as he knows they can follow him, Alfie on his bike and Eddie on his skateboard. They could easily follow him.

By the time he turns the corner towards the clinic, they have stopped calling for him and do not follow him. He is walking furiously, almost running, and he sees the empty

parking lot of the clinic within just a few minutes. There are only two cars: Rena Kadlubowski's tiny Volkswagen and his dad's Toyota. He runs to the clinic as fast as his legs will go, skidding to a stop in front of the door, and he tries to open the door. The doorknob doesn't budge. He bangs on the door a few times, shouting for his dad. There is a very faint sound of someone on the other side. Mark waits, but no one answers. He walks over to his dad's car and sits on the ground with his back against the back passenger tire. His knees meet his chest and he wraps his arms around them, resting his chin on top.

Only five or so minutes have passed when his dad walks out with Rena. Mark hardly realizes that his arm was around her waist, hand low on her hip, until they see him sitting there and his dad takes it away.

"What are you-" his dad starts to say.

"I waited at Eddie's for forever," Mark says. "I waited until Emilio got home and you still didn't come."

"You were staying the night."

"That's *next* week. For Eddie's birthday."

His dad looks like he wants to argue, but he doesn't. He pulls out a cigarette and puts it in his mouth, even though he doesn't light it.

"Alright," he finally says. "My mistake."

Mark wants to argue and he doesn't know why. He doesn't want it to be suddenly OK and he doesn't want his dad to feel OK about it. He opens his mouth to argue and Rena catches his attention as she squirms a little, adjusting something at her shoulders.

"Your shirt's on backwards," he says instead. "And your hair is messy-" she put a hand to her hair- "and there's something on your neck-" he saw a look of horror cross her face as she put her other hand to her neck, covering up the dark spot.

"Mark," his dad says firmly, "get up. We're going home."

Mark gets up and he thinks his dad is angrier at that than he would have been if he'd argued, but as he watches Rena get into her car and check her hair and neck, he hides a smile as his dad drives away.

When they get home, his dad throws the dead rattlesnake off into the desert and Mark stands on the metal stairs, waiting for him to unlock the door. His dad wipes his hands on his jeans and comes over to unlock it. He stands on the stairs with a lit cigarette in his fingers while Mark sneaks in the door behind his legs.

Mark doesn't see it at first. He drags the bag from the morning outside and his dad picks it up and when Mark goes back in he sees it sitting on the kitchen counter. The Easter lily Goose had been watering is sitting on the counter, the leaves and flowers are still and bright in the dim trailer. Mark sees a note attached and starts towards it.

“Mark, leave it.”

He stops for a moment, but he can’t help himself. He takes a few more steps, sees Goose’s scrawl on the paper, and he almost has it when his dad’s hand comes down on his arm.

“I said *leave it*.”

Mark is close enough to see his name written at the top of the note. He tries to pull his arm back, but his father’s hand is still tightly holding it.

“That hurts,” he says, trying to pull it back again. As soon as the words leave his mouth, his dad lets go and snatches up the note, shoving it in his pocket without looking. Mark pulls the arm to himself, holding it to his ribs tenderly.

“He doesn’t have a goddamn *right*,” his dad is muttering, pulling the note back out already and glancing at it. The note only seems to make things worse. He pulls out his lighter and sets it on fire, throwing it in the sink where Mark can’t see it shrivel and burn up.

“That was *mine*,” Mark says. He takes a few steps back as his dad looks at him suddenly. “That was *mine*. I saw my name-”

“That was my name,” his dad says.

“But-”

“It was my name. Jack, Mark. Same number of letters. You just didn’t see it right. Goose can’t write for shit. Why would it be for you?”

“It was *mine*,” Mark says again, knowing that he saw his name at the top. The writing was spiky and he can see the angles of the M and A and R still in his mind.

“It’s just a goddamn plant and a note. It wasn’t for you-”

“It was.”

His dad puts a hand on the plant and Mark does know what makes him do it and he can’t even think before he launches himself at the arm. As soon as his dad realizes what he’s doing he brings his arm up and deflects him. Mark hits the floor before he even knows what happened. His lower back hits first and then his elbows just before the rest of his back. He lays there for a moment, the breath knocked out of him, and feels himself shivering. His arm still hurts from his dad grabbing it earlier.

“What the *fuck* was that about?”

Mark blinks hard and when he opens his eyes, there is something blurry about the images in front of him. He sees the colored outline of his dad, white shirt and blue jeans, but the edges are fuzzy so he blinks again. His dad looks normal now, except for the lip lifted in a sneer, showing his front teeth and Mark thinks of a dog who had growled and snarled at him once.

“What, Mark?” his dad asks. His voice is full of viciousness, like if that dog had been able to talk, to ask why Mark was walking by him or what Mark had been doing.

“I don’t-” Mark tries to say something, but he doesn’t even know what he’s done wrong- “I just wanted it-”

“What for?” his dad asks sharply. Mark looks at his dad and he looks different somehow, but still the same. There is a monster in his skin, using his skin to talk to Mark because there’s no way his dad would be like this on his own.

“It just-- it looks nice. It’s-” Mark stumbles over the next word- “pretty.”

There is a pause on his dad’s end and Mark doesn’t know why. He lays on the floor, still shivering while the air conditioner is running full blast.

“It’s ‘pretty?’”

Mark nods and for once his dad doesn’t make a comment about it.

“That’s all, it’s ‘pretty?’”

Mark nods. His dad is breathing heavily and he stares down at him for a long while. He turns sharply and goes into his bedroom, shutting the door loudly. Mark gets off the floor after a few minutes, going into his bedroom to find a book to read. He starts to read a Henry Huggins book again and he is only a few pages in when he thinks, as Henry has breakfast with his parents, that it is not all that different from how he has breakfast with his dad’s most mornings, but it’s also not the same. Mr. Huggins doesn’t tear through the fridge looking for a can of beer (and Mark can play dumb, but he knows what his dad is looking for and he always knows), doesn’t get angry over a plant, and Mark isn’t a dumb kid and he knows books aren’t real life, but Mr. Suarez doesn’t do any of that either. Granny likes her cigarettes and Mrs. Suarez likes ice cream and none of them do anything like that.

He is staring down at the pages of the book, eyes noting the black letters and words on cheap paper without reading them, and he doesn’t notice at first when his bedroom door opens. He is thinking about the dog who had growled and snarled at him. He had been walking to Eddie’s and the dog was near him and he had stood, frozen, while it inspected him. It had tried to bite him, he remembered now, except someone had been coming by and he could not remember who.

“Markie,” his dad says quietly. Mark looks up from the book, hoping his dad looks like he always had, sharp and clear and strong without any doubt. He does at first, but Mark sees him swallow nervously, sees his Adam’s apple move up and down, and the fuzziness comes back. Mark rubs his eyes fiercely and nothing changes.

“What?” Mark asks and is surprised by how his voice comes out, like how Eddie or Alfie talk to each other and (rarely) to their mother.

He sees his dad’s face tighten and his lips start to lose color.

“I-” and he is hesitant and Mark is happy, Mark wants him to be upset and to feel like his insides do, like his stomach and heart and lungs and liver have all switched up places and tied up all their arteries and veins together when they moved.

Instead of continuing to speak, his dad looks down at his bookshelf, inspecting the various rocks and sediment fragments Mark has collected. His fingers reach for them and suddenly he pulls back, putting his hands behind his back as he looks down at Mark.

"I called Goose," he says, "and he says he'll be by tomorrow."

"For what?"

"To get his stupid plant."

"But--"

"Markie, it'd be one thing if I had a clue how to take care of it, but I don't and you don't know either. Between us we'd just-- we'd just end up ruining it."

"No," Mark says, "I think we'd do OK."

His dad looks at him oddly, his head cocked at a slight angle, and Mark meets his eyes defiantly, daring him to something he did not understand. His dad does nothing, says nothing, but his eyebrows tilt upwards.

"I need some cigarettes," his dad says, opening his pack and pulling out his last one. He finally looks away from Mark and down into the empty pack. "I gotta run into town. I'll be back soon--"

"But what--"

"We'll kill it," his dad says and Mark hears a very faint hint of the monster from earlier. "We'll over water it or under nourish it or leave it alone too long."

And for the first time, Mark wonders if his dad is talking about the lily out on the kitchen counter.

"We had one," Mark says, trying to draw out his early memories, "we had a lily and--"

"It died," his dad says quietly. "I didn't take care of it. I didn't want to. Didn't think I had to."

"My mom did," Mark says very quietly and he remembers that. He remembers her watering it while he played with his favorite Matchbox car on the coffee table and he remembers that she had liked to hum while she wandered around the trailer while he played alone, reading from big books that she shared with his dad.

His dad had been toying with his last cigarette in his fingers and he started so that the cigarette broke, spilling some tobacco on the floor.

"I have to go to the store," his dad says flatly. "I'll be back soon."

"I want to--"

"I need some time alone."

He turns and Mark watches him leave, imagines him striding across the living room to the door and he leaps from his bed to barrel out of his bedroom, his heart pounding on his ribs like Keith Moon played the drums in that one documentary--

He sees the door shut and it shuts quietly. All Mark hears is how quiet the click of the door is and he runs to the door, frantic and hardly realizing what he's doing as he doesn't even bother to check under the metal stairs for rattlesnakes like he's always been taught. He sees his dad look up from where he's unlocking the car door, sees a frown and a furrow of his eyebrows but he doesn't care, he can't care--

"You don't have to go into town you don't have to go and we can watch Tom and Jerry or we can just sit and talk and you don't have to--"

"Mark, what--"

"*You don't have to go*," Mark screams, finally reaching the car. He runs into the front of it and bounces back a few steps, swaying to keep his balance. He swallows a hard lump in his throat and he only now realizes he is crying, but he must have been for awhile because he feels tears drying already on his jaw.

"Jesus Christ," his dad mutters, casting a look up into the endless night sky. Mark closes his eyes tightly, standing there in just his khaki shorts and his sunburn is burning fiercely and he feels the sand and gravel under his callused feet and he is shivering in the rapidly chilling desert night with his hands clenched at his sides.

"I'll be back," his dad says, opening the car door. "I won't be longer than twenty or thirty minutes."

"Don't--"

"Mark, I *need* something to drink. If I'm going to deal with--"

"But I got-- I got cigarettes--"

"But I don't have anything to drink."

"We've got water--"

"It's not the same, Markie," he says softly.

Mark opens his eyes and in the dim light of dusk he sees his dad moving slowly, slouching as he gets into the driver's seat.

"Daddy," he says, "you don't--"

"I'll be back soon," his dad says. "I'll be back in just a little while. A half-hour. Maybe an hour."

He turns the car on, the engine quietly coming to life. The headlights blind Mark and he flinches, covering his eyes for a few moments. It's just enough time for his dad to pull out of the driveway.

Mark wants to scream, wants to yell and hope that his dad comes back because when his mom left he hadn't. He had waited for a few minutes and then he'd crawled onto the counter to get some cookies. She hadn't made supper and he'd been hungry, so he'd eaten all the cookies in one of the sleeves and then got sick and his dad came home just a little while later--

But he says nothing, does nothing while he watches the taillights disappear off in the distance. All he hears is the car roaring down the road interspersed with his own wheezing. When he no longer sees or hears his father's car, he turns and makes his way back to the trailer. He feels his stomach growling and searches, finding nothing that won't need cooked.

He thinks the whole time that his dad will be back in an hour. He had said he would and he had never broken a promise, not to Mark... except he had today. He had said he would be there at three-thirty and he wasn't and he had promised his mother something because all Mark could remember was how she had screamed at him, "Jack, you promised me better-" and that sounded like he hadn't done something right.

Mark gets up and looks at his dad's bedroom door thoughtfully, wondering if there is something inside to tell him. As he walks by the kitchen counter, he remembers who had saved him from the vicious dog. Goose had been walking by and he had seen the dog snarling at Mark, lunging to bite and he had pulled out his pistol by the barrel, smashing it into the dog's head until it laid still on the concrete. Mark glances at the lily and continues, putting his hands on his dad's cool bedroom door.

The knob turns easily in his grip, even though it's loose and makes a metallic sound sometimes. He stands in the doorway of his dad's bedroom and wonders where he would hide important things. The important things to Mark are his rocks and his books, which are on his bookshelf, and what else is there on his bookshelf--

His cigarettes. The half-smoked cigarettes his dad and his friends leave all over the place after poker. He hides those behind his books because his dad shouldn't see them and he knows he'd be in trouble if he knew. Mark looks at his dad's bookshelf, which is the only thing that has a pristine shine to it in the room. The titles are printed on the large spines. Mark sees *Essentials of Clinical Neuroanatomy and Neurophysiology*, *Harris's Guide to Internal Medicine*, *Gray's Anatomy of the Human Body*, *A Review of Physiological Chemistry*, and he blinks so he'll stop staring at them. He can't read them and he can barely read most of the titles.

He begins by depositing *Harris's Guide to Internal Medicine* on the ground. It leaves a large gap on the third row and Mark moves another medical dictionary to put his hand behind the books and fish around. His reach is limited, so he pulls out his hand and begins to methodically throw all the books on the floor until the shelf is empty. Disappointed but not deterred, he clears most of the second shelf in a frantic delight that lights up his green eyes. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees part of a paper, but he leaves the second shelf to demolish the first. He throws the books to the ground and throws them away from himself, as far as his scrawny muscle will launch them with their massive weight. Even when he thinks he hears his dad's car he doesn't stop. Once the first shelf is empty, he returns to the second shelf. He only dumps *Case Studies of Alcoholism and Their Projected Courses* before he

realizes that he is tired, so he reaches behind the few books that are left and grabs the file folder of papers hidden back there.

The mess is left there while he clutches the folder and goes to his bedroom with them. Mark takes out newspaper clippings first, unable to read most of the headlines. *Alcohol Played Role in Patient's Death* is the only one he reads before it all gets blurry... There are articles with each one, but he tries to read them and all he sees is his dad's name over and over, nothing else will make words for him.

He pushes those away from himself and starts to rifle through the pictures. He tries to keep going, but the first picture mesmerizes him.

It is from a newspaper and the caption is still there. It is a very pretty young woman entering the side door of a hospital, her face obscured by a scarf as snow falls around her. She has dark hair and her eyes are averted from the camera. *Dr. Lily Benson, 29, enters for her second day of questioning regarding the death of Raymond Petersen.*

She is prettier than Yvonne Suarez has ever been, he is sure. He stares down, his lips pursed tightly together as he starts crying. His hands are wrapped up in his sheets, clutching them. He makes no noise while he cries except for labored breathing. The only thing he does is to stare at the photo. He only cries for a few minutes and then he gets off his bed and gets his pile of half-smoked cigarettes from behind his Henry Huggins books. In their place he puts the photo, but he leaves everything else on his bed as he takes his pile of cigarettes outside into the dark.

He tries to throw them all in the hole at once and when he does, he stands there for a moment, staring down at them. There's no reason for him to cry, there's no reason for him to get down and get the cigarettes again, is there? *Is there?* No, there's not. There's not.

But Mark gets on his knees and pulls a hand full of them back up. He holds them in his hand tightly as he goes back to his bedroom and puts them back behind his books, making sure to separate them from the photo. They are smashed and broken up, worse than they had been, but he feels something ease in his chest, knowing they are there. They are there, sitting in a mixed up pile next to Lily Benson's photo. He goes back into the kitchen to double-check for something to eat. There is still nothing, of course.

Mark looks at the clock on the wall. His dad has been gone nearly two hours. For the first time in his life, Mark wonders what will happen if his dad doesn't come back. He pulls himself onto the barstool and sits in front of the Easter lily. It has a very faint fragrance. He does not lean forward to smell it. He looks, instead, at how sharp and clear the leaves and flower look, even in the dimness of the trailer. The whiteness makes him think of a lighthouse, even though he's never even seen a lake, let alone an ocean or lighthouse.

There is no telling how long he sits there quietly, thinking of the picture in his bedroom, with his face inches from the Easter lily. While he sits there, he thinks about his

dad and his drinking. While he sits there, he thinks about his dad and how there is a monster living under his skin, how the monster could tear out and destroy his dad, lurking underneath. Mostly while he sits there quietly, Mark wonders how he has never seen it before.

After awhile, he finally looks up and out of the kitchen window. It is small and grimy, smeared with dirt and dust. Mark can still see out of it and he wishes he couldn't even though he wants a car to drive by, to slow down and pull into the dirt driveway, but he looks away even as he sees a pair of headlights down the road. All he has eyes for is the vast blackness of the desert night.